



City of Seattle Seattle Planning Commission

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April 23, 2004

Council President Jan Drago
Seattle City Council
Seattle City Hall, 600 4th Avenue;
PO Box 34025
Seattle, WA 98124-4025

Dear Council President Drago and Councilmembers:

In the next few weeks, the Seattle City Council will be making critical decisions relating to the Seattle Monorail Project (SMP) – the final alignment and station locations as well as the Transit Way Agreement. We appreciate the importance and gravity of the decisions you must make. These decisions represent the City of Seattle's opportunity to shape this system so that it is an asset to people's mobility and to the physical environment of neighborhoods throughout the route of the alignment.

The Planning Commission has been actively involved in the Monorail Review Panel (MRP) since its inception in 2003. Three Commissioners sit on the panel and have devoted hundreds of hours reviewing and advising the project in intense detail. The MRP will be sending detailed comments to Council on the alignment and station location and the Transit Way Agreement. We urge you to carefully review and consider the comments from this expert advisory panel.

In addition to representatives on the MRP, the full Planning Commission has been involved in the monorail project over the past three years, providing input to the monorail staff as well as the City. This past fall the Commission reviewed and provided comments to the SMP's DEIS and in January shared with you our input and recommendations on the monorail alignment and station locations. We are attaching these documents for your reference, but want to take this opportunity to highlight what we believe are the most important points that should be considered in the upcoming decisions you will make.

1. Take the time necessary to make the best decisions.

The Planning Commission urges you to take the time you need to fully understand the issues and have clear answers to your questions before making critical decisions on the alignment/station locations and the Transitway Agreement. The pace at which this project has been moving has been amazing. Taking additional time now will make little difference in the overall SMP schedule, but will make a tremendous difference in assuring the people of Seattle that you are making the best decisions possible for their future and the future of their city.

2. Take care in negotiating the Transit Way Agreement to address impact mitigation.

The Transit Way Agreement must address mitigation measures assertively and in detail.

The Mitigation Chapter in the Final EIS does not give the City much assurance that impacts from the Monorail will be addressed comprehensively since its list of mitigation measures is largely illustrative. Given the early stage of design and engineering, it is clear that the City and SMP cannot rely on the FEIS alone to identify and determine appropriate mitigation for impacts of the monorail system. This is particularly important in light of the DBOM strategy to be used by the SMP and budget constraints. As the project moves further into design and permitting, more specific mitigation measures must be determined. The City must retain authority to stipulate mitigation actions and ensure implementation of mitigation measures for the term of the project.

3. Define carefully the “envelope in space” for the monorail.

The Transit Way Agreement should describe the “envelope of space” for the monorail as accurately and as definitively as possible. The City should be very conservative in giving away its authority over the public right-of-way, particularly since the City is ultimately responsible for the overall health of the adjacent buildings (both existing and future development), streets, circulation and quality of life in the public realm.

4. Make the Transit Way Agreement a phased or conditional action.

The Planning Commission urges the City Council to make the Transit Way Agreement either phased or conditional action, retaining the ability to review and decide on future plans and designs as project details and specifications emerge. While this may meet with opposition from SMP, it is critical that the City not give up its control over the transit way until these details have been worked out to the satisfaction of the City. It is critical that the City not foreclose further review of the transit way until detailed design information and plans are available. Project details critical to the neighborhood, commercial, and urban development interests remain to be determined and project designs may change as a result of future contract arrangements.

5. Mitigate construction impacts through timing and sequencing of construction.

The Planning Commission recommends that the City carefully consider the timing and sequencing of construction so as to mitigate cumulative impacts. The Transitway Agreement should ensure that the City Council and the SDOT Director have approval authority with regard to sequence of construction in relation to other major projects. Specifically this should include consideration of timing and sequence of impacts associated with buses coming out of the downtown tunnel, proposed changes to Third Avenue’s designation as a Transit Priority Street, construction of the Monorail on Second Avenue, and the Viaduct reconstruction..

6. Ensure excellent bus transit linkages and services to support monorail.

The Planning Commission urges the City Council to commit to ensuring that bus transit linkages to the monorail stations are easy and frequent and do not have a negative impact on overall bus transit ridership. The integration of monorail with other transit service, most notably bus transit is critical to the success of the monorail system and of its stations.

7. Link Station Area Planning Actions with the monorail project.

Finally, the Planning Commission calls on you to link the monorail station area plan outcomes with the overall monorail project. The City should make a strong commitment to codify the actions of the station area plans to that they are implemented. These action plans should be used in conjunction with the Transitway Agreement to evaluate any shifts in the monorail project as it proceeds and determine appropriate actions and responsibilities for capital improvements needed to make the stations safe, attractive and accessible.

The City has a critical obligation to ensure that the monorail project is truly the asset it is intended to be – not only for those riding it, but also to the surrounding communities and to the overall transit system. We urge you to take our recommendations into consideration as you make your decisions on the monorail alignment/station locations and as you negotiate the Transitway Agreement.

Sincerely,

John Owen
Chair

cc: Grace Crunican, SDOT
Ethan Melone, SDOT
Susan Sanchez, SDOT

Diane Sugimura, DPD
Cheryl Sizov, DPD
John Rahaim, DPD

Attachments: SPC Jan. 8, 2004 letter; SPC October 27, 2003 letter